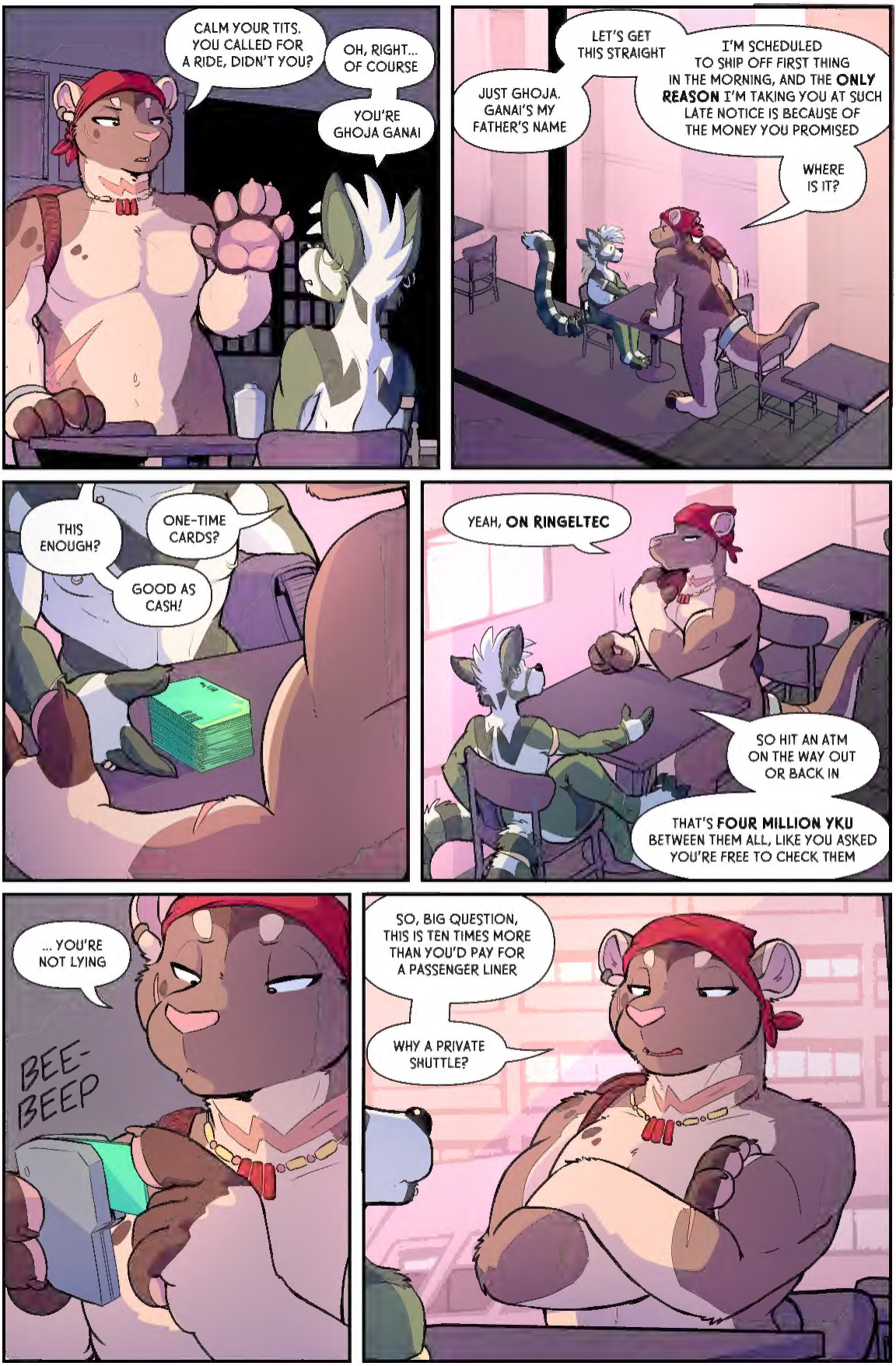
SKINCHANGE

a Hayven Celestia story by Rick Griffin
color by Qualzar

SYSAMPAM

SPECIAL TRADE DESIGNATION, RINGELTEC


CALM YOUR TITS. YOU CALLED FOR A RIDE, DIDN'T YOU?
OH, RIGHT... OF COURSE
YOU'RE GHOJA GANAI
LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT
JUST GHOJA. GANAI'S MY FATHER'S NAME
I'M SCHEDULED TO SHIP OFF FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, AND THE **ONLY REASON** I'M TAKING YOU AT SUCH LATE NOTICE IS BECAUSE OF THE MONEY YOU PROMISED
WHERE IS IT?
THIS ENOUGH?
ONE-TIME CARDS?
GOOD AS CASH!
YEAH, **ON RINGELTEC**
SO HIT AN ATM ON THE WAY OUT OR BACK IN
THAT'S **FOUR MILLION YKU** BETWEEN THEM ALL, LIKE YOU ASKED YOU'RE FREE TO CHECK THEM
... YOU'RE NOT LYING
BEE-BEEP
SO, BIG QUESTION, THIS IS TEN TIMES MORE THAN YOU'D PAY FOR A PASSENGER LINER
WHY A PRIVATE SHUTTLE?

ISN'T FOUR MILLION ENOUGH FOR "NO QUESTIONS ASKED"?
NO!
DO YOU EVEN KNOW HOW MUCH A SINGLE ATMOSPHERIC SHUTTLE COSTS?
IF I HAD THE MONEY TO OWN IT I WOULDN'T BE FLYING IT!
SO--WHY?
MY MATE HAS...
...DIED...
...UNEXPECTEDLY
MY CONDOLENCES. YOU WANT TRANSPORT OUT OF PITY?
I AM NOT STAYING FOR THE FUNERAL. I WANT OFF THE PLANET.
READ BETWEEN THE LINES
YEESH, IT USUALLY TAKES A LOT FOR A RINGEL TO SPEAK SO COYLY
LOOK--
NAH, I GET IT. SOMEONE'S AFTER YOU, YOU NEED TO KEEP IT ON THE DOWN LOW
TROUBLE I CAN HANDLE, SO LONG AS THE AUTHORITIES AREN'T GONNA STOP US AT THE CHECKPOINT
YOU CAN CHECK MY PASSPORT NOW IF YOU WANT

CLICK
WELL, MR. YRRARE, YOU'VE HIRED YOURSELF A SHUTTLE
WHOOPS, DAMMIT
NO IT'S FINE, LEMME GET THAT--

DAMMIT, THIS THING FUCKING **LAGS** I SWEAR
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP
THIS IS WHY I SAID I WANTED A BALLISTIC RIFLE AND A ROOFTOP
YOU JUST WANTED A RIFLE SO YOU COULD DO THAT THING IN THE MOVIES, WHERE THE SNIPER IS RECEIVING HEAD WHILE LINING UP A SHOT
NOT NECESSARILY!
SHUT THE **FUCK** UP AND DITCH THE DRONE, ASSHOLES!
WE'RE MOVING TO **PLAN B**--WE HAVE LESS THAN TWO MINUTES OR THEY'RE GONNA BOLT!
YOU **SHIT!** I SAID I COULD HANDLE **TROUBLE**, LIKE SOMEONE TAILING YOU! I DIDN'T MEAN TO INCLUDE A **WARZONE!**
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, I THOUGHT I'D SHAKEN THEM ALL OFF!
ALL? AS IN, MORE THAN ONE?
ZAP
ZAP
ZORCH

...IS IT OVER?
DON'T YOU DARE SHOW YOUR EARS!
STAY LOW AND SLIP OUT THROUGH THE KITCHEN
SOMEONE TOOK OUT MY FRONT WINDOW!
NO, IT WASN'T AN ACCIDENT, THEY FIRED LIKE FORTY SHOTS INTO THE WALL!
DUDE I AM SO DITCHING AFTER CLEANUP
WHY NOT DITCH NOW?
÷SIGH÷ I STILL NEED TO GET PAID

PARAMEDICS! ANYONE HURT?
THANK THE GODS--I MIGHT HAVE BEEN GRAZED, BUT CAN YOU GET US OUT OF HERE DISCREETLY?
OF COURSE!
UP HERE, WATCH YOUR STEP
!

I SAW THAT!
OOK
GHOJA
WHAT THE HELL, GHOJA!
RINGELTEC MAY HAVE LAX WEAPON LAWS, BUT I KNOW THEY DON'T LET PARAMEDICS WEAR FIREARMS IN THIS CITY
WHAT THE--
DID YOU REALLY THINK PARAMEDICS WOULD ARRIVE WITHIN TWO MINUTES OF A DISASTER?
I THOUGHT THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN NEARBY?
CLACK
WELL, WE WERE
CLACK

FAIR WARNING, THESE GUNS ARE SET TO WIDE BLAST, BUT THEY'LL STILL DISINTEGRATE FLESH JUST FINE
DON'T MAKE THIS DIFFICULT! WE HAVE YOU CORNERED, SUGO!
WAIT... SUGO?
YOU DON'T MEAN SERU SUGO, DO YOU? THE MOVIE PRODUCER?!
OH FUCK...
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE COVERING FOR HIM
CLANK
NO, NO! YOU GOT THE WRONG GUY
THIS IS A BIG MISUNDERSTANDING!
OH REALLY?
MY UNDERSTANDING IS THAT YOUR NAME IS GHOJA, HE SAYS HE'S "RAKHAM", AND YOU HAVE FOUR MILLION YKU IN YOUR SATCHEL THAT BELONGS TO THE BOSS
CRACK

FAR BE IT FROM ME TO STEAL FROM ANYONE NAMED "THE BOSS"! **HERE!** TAKE IT!
UH, PEOPLE AREN'T USUALLY THAT FORTHCOMING WITH THE MONEY... NOW WHAT?
NO WITNESSES
OH, RIGHT!
SNAP SNAP
GHOJA, GET IN!

YEEP
ZAP
SLAM
THE FUCK?!
SINCE WHEN COULD SUGO FUCKING HOTWIRE A VAN?!
STOP
YOU IDIOTS, I REINFORCED THE DAMN THING!

DAMMIT, MY STRAND WAS IN THAT BAG!
KTH
UNK
OH THANK THE GODS...
OKAY, "SERU SUGO", YOU'D BETTER START TALKING!
GAH!

I TOLD YOU, MY NAME IS RAKHAM!
THEN YOU'D BETTER HAVE A REALLY GOOD EXPLANATION WHY THE MAFIA THINKS YOU'RE A FAMOUS MOVIE PRODUCER!
.. I DON'T KNOW?
YOU SAID YOU'D SHAKEN THEM ALL OFF, YOU CLEARLY HAD "THEM ALL" IN MIND, SO TELL ME WHO YOU ARE AND WHY THEY'RE TRYING TO KILL YOU, OR I'LL SNAP YOUR NECK!
OKAY OKAY!
I WAS SERU SUGO
YOU SHITSTAIN. I HAD A POSTER OF VEVONRU IN MY QUARTERS
HOW MANY TIMES CAN I SAY I'M SORRY?!
I DON'T LIKE WHAT HAPPENED ANYMORE THAN YOU!
VEVON WAS MY FRIEND!
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH SHE MEANT TO EVERYONE?
--THAT PEACE ENFORCEMENT W LL TRY THE PRODUCER ON CHARGES OF GROSS NEGLIGENCE AND OBSTRUCTION, FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF NTERPLANETARY SUPERSTAR VEVONRU, WHO SUFFOCATED WHILE FILM NG A SCENE FOR HER NEW MOVIE PEACE ENFORCEMENT C..A M THAT SUGO D D NOT CALL EMERGENCY SERVICES N A TIMELY MANNER AND ATTEMPTED TO COVER UP EV DENCE OF MULTIPLE SAFETY INFRACTIONS SUGO CLAIMS THAT NONE OF THE INFRACT ONS WERE CONTRIBUTORS TO VEVONRU'S DEATH--
BECAUSE I WAS THERE AT THE TRIAL! IT WAS MY TRIAL!

OKAY... BUT YOU **WERE** STILL RESPONSIBLE
AND I WOULD ***PERSONALLY*** SUCK THE COCK AND/OR CUNT OF EVERYONE ON RINGELTEC IF THAT'D MAKE UP FOR IT
BUT THEY WANTED **MONEY**
AND WHERE WAS ***I*** GONNA GET IT? ESPECIALLY AFTER A MOVIE PRODUCER KILLS HIS OWN STAR... YOU WORK IN THE MOVIES AND EVERYONE ***ASSUMES*** YOU HAVE TRILLIONS OF YKU TO SPARE!
I'M NOT. SO THE COURTS WERE GONNA SHIP ME OFF TO KRAKUNTEC AS **A SLAVE!**
SO... I MAY HAVE GONE TO **OLOX REAGAIX** FOR A LITTLE LOAN
HOW MUCH DID YOU BORROW
NOW BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING-- BEFORE I BECAME A PRODUCER, I PITCHED ***BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES.*** SO EVEN THOUGH I ASKED FOR ***MORE THAN THE FINE,*** REAGIX KNEW I COULD, THEORETICALLY, PAY IT ALL BACK ***WITH INTEREST***
HOW MUCH WAS IT?
A HUNDRED SIXTEEN BILLION
A HUNDRED AND SIXTEEN BILLION?!

IT WASN'T THAT MUCH MORE THAN TWICE THE FINE!
BUT YOU **DIDN'T** WORK TO MAKE THE MONEY BACK, YOU'RE FLEEING WITH IT
YOU KNEW THE MOB WAS JUST GONNA KILL YOU IF YOU FLED, RIGHT?
IT WAS EITHER THAT OR LET THE KRAKUN KILL ME SLOWLY OVER DECADES!
YOU WERE PLANNING ON STIFFING A MOB BOSS ALL ALONG, THEN?
WOULDN'T YOU IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE?
I VALUE MY HIDE COVERING MY BONES, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
SORRY, BUT I DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF RESPECT FOR **MURDERERS**
THERE'S **NO WAY** I WAS GOING TO GIVE HIM BILLIONS ON RETURN, EVEN IF I REALLY COULD HAVE MADE IT BACK
SINCE I COULDN'T TRADE ON THE NAME OF "SERU SUGO" ANYMORE, I TOLD REAGAIX I NEEDED AN IDENTITY CHANGE, INCLUDING A **FULL BODY CHANGE**
I SHOWED HIM VIDEO OF A DIFFERENT BODY ENTIRELY
HE **SHOULD** HAVE THOUGHT MY NEW ID WAS "BUBENCE KIKIX"
I WASN'T GOING TO FLEE THE ENTIRE PLANET, BUT **SOMEHOW** REAGAIX FOUND OUT I WAS PLANNING TO STIFF HIM TOO EARLY
I WAS HOPING TO SLIP OFF BEFORE HE COULD FIGURE OUT WHO I'D REALLY BECOME

...ONE LAST QUESTION. HOW LONG'S THE SURGERY FOR A FULL BODY CHANGE?
A SESSION'S USUALLY ABOUT TWELVE HOURS, AND I HAD ELEVEN OF THEM OVER HALF A YEAR. WHY?
MAKE A RIGHT DIVE HERE, NOW
UH, THAT TUNNEL GOES TO THE UNDERCITY--
NOW!
YEEK!
THE UNDERCITY. MANY RINGELTEC CITIES HAVE THESE-- REMNANTS OF OLD SUBWAY TUNNELS FROM BEFORE ANTIGRAV TRAFFIC OBSOLETED UNGERGROUND RAIL. THEY WERE BLOCKED OFF FOR CENTURIES, BUT TRANSFORMED INTO A CONVENIENT HOLDING SPOT FOR THE LOWER CLASS

CRUNCH
AT LEAST THE GRAVITY STOP KICKED IN--
BOOOSH
THE HELL DID YOU DO TO MY STAND?!

THING'S YOURS IF YOU WANT IT

HEY, THAT'S MINE! GIVE IT!
WE NEED TO GET TO THE NORTH SIDE EXIT
KEEP YOUR SATCHEL WRAPPED UNDER YOUR ARMS AND **DON'T** MAKE EYE CONTACT

I'M STILL EXPECTING PAYMENT
AGAIN
AND YOU'RE PAYING FOR THE GUNS
GUNS?!

HUNDRED THOUSAND
CLACK CLACK
KEEP THE CHANGE
YOUR PATRONAGE IS WELCOME
A TIP FOR YOUR GENEROSITY-- DON'T GO UP TUNNELS AROUND KAIZEN BLOCK TODAY
THANKS
DO YOU THINK WE'LL BE ATTACKED?
NOT IF YOU SHUT UP AND STOP SIGNALING HOW OUT OF PLACE WE ARE
ANCESTORS, SAVE ME

IF THE REAGAIX ARE AT ALL COMPETENT THEY'LL SUSPECT WE'RE COMING OUT THE NORTH THROUGHWAY, AND THEY'LL KNOW ALL THE SIDE PASSAGES
BUT HOPEFULLY THEY WON'T HAVE MUSTERED ENOUGH PAWS TO COVER THEM ALL
YOU KNOW HOW TO SHOOT A GUN?
YEAH. I'VE BEEN PRACTICING
LIKE HOW YOU KNEW HOW TO HOTWIRE AN AMBULANCE IN UNDER FIFTEEN SECONDS?
I TOLD YOU I'M NOT STUPID!
I KNEW HOW DANGEROUS REAGAIX WAS BEFORE I GOT INVOLVED
I JUST DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE
I REFUSE TO BE MADE ANOTHER FACELESS SLAVE FOR THE KRAKUN
SO IT WAS WORTH YOUR MATE'S LIFE, THEN?
DON'T YOU DARE BRING THAT UP!
YOU JUST HAVEN'T SEEMED PARTICULARLY BROKEN UP ABOUT IT FOR IT HAVING HAPPENED SO RECENTLY
I'M STILL WONDERING HOW MUCH YOU'RE TELLING THE TRUTH

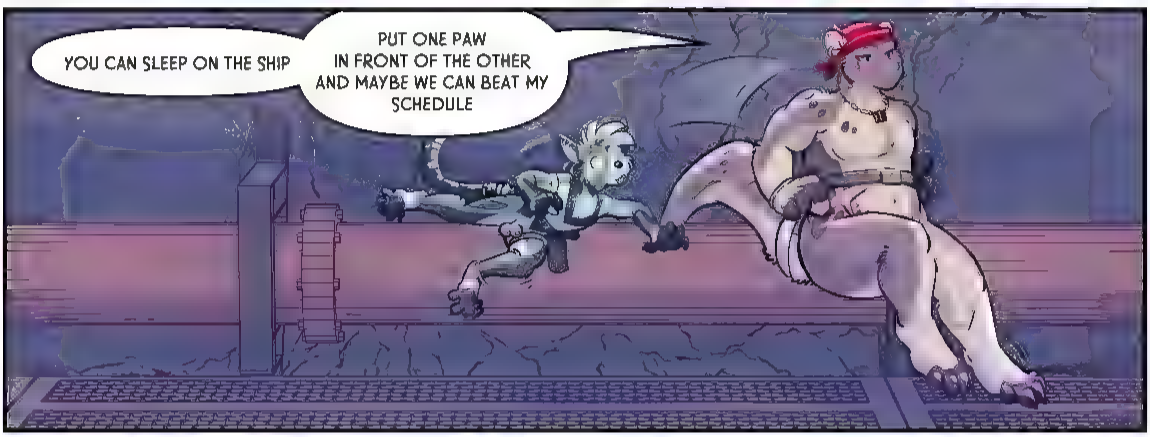
THAT'S BECAUSE I HAVEN'T ALLOWED MYSELF ANY TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT!
MY BRAIN'S BEEN IN **SURVIVAL MODE** ALL WEEK
I KEEP THINKING I COULD JUST GO HOME AND SEE THEM THERE, AND IF I STOP FOR A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT IT, I'LL
I WAS STUPID

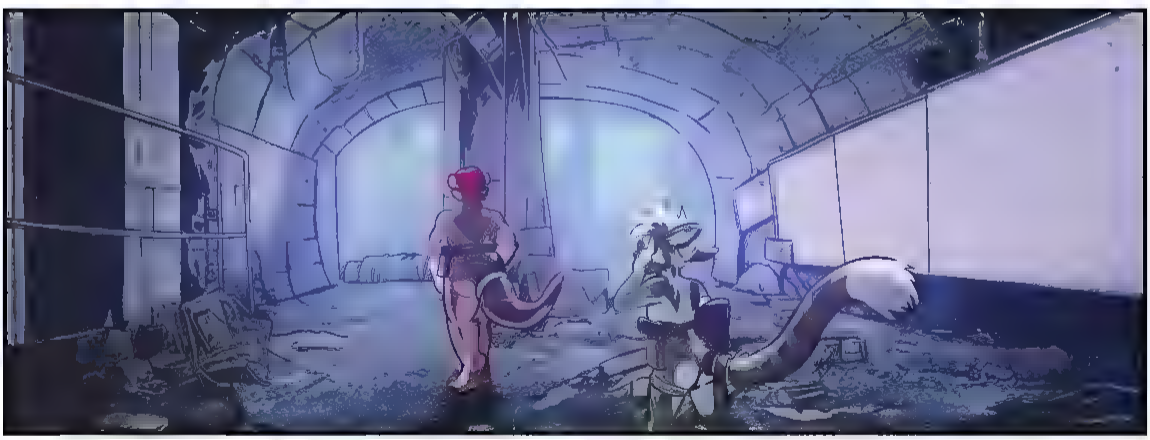
ABROJE STUCK WITH ME THROUGH THE WHOLE MEDIA ORDEAL, THE SUITS, EVERYTHING. BUT IF THE COURT SHIPPED ME OFF AS A SLAVE, THEY COULDN'T EXACTLY COME WITH ME
IT'S WHY I MADE THE DEAL AT ALL
ABROJE WAS HESITANT ABOUT DISAPPEARING, THEY STILL HAD FAMILY HERE AND DIDN'T WANT TO START THEIR LIFE OVER
I'D FINALLY CONVINCED THEM ABOUT A MONTH AGO TO GET THE FULLBODY DONE
I WAS... I WAS SURE I'D DONE EVERYTHING RIGHT
I'D PAID OUT A LOT OF MONEY TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE I WAS STARTING THE BUSINESS, CONTRACTORS, EVERYTHING
I WAS **SURE** THAT'D CONVINCE REAGAIX THAT I WAS GONNA MAKE A GOOD FAITH EFFORT TO STAY
BUT

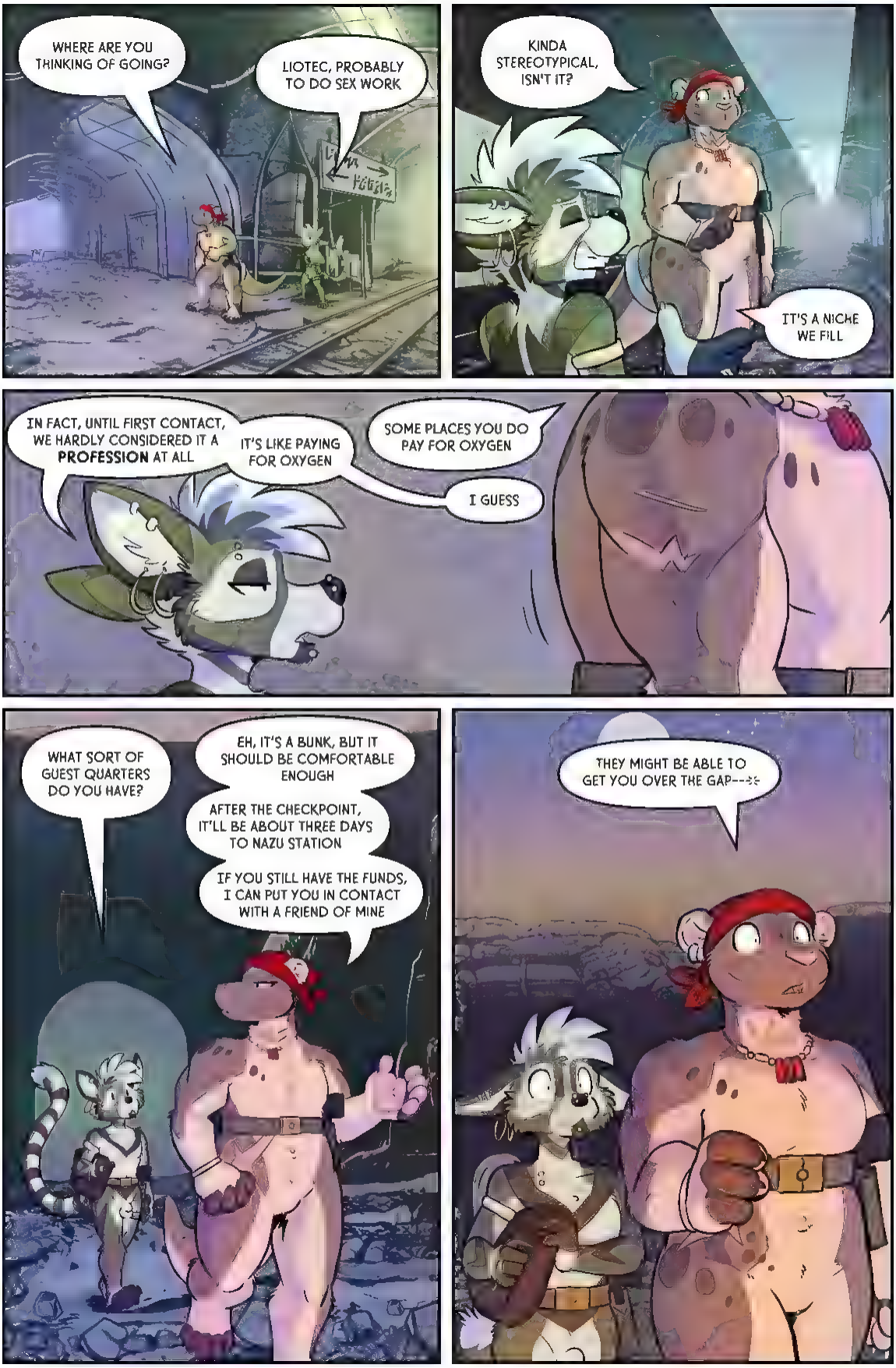
NEEDLESS TO SAY
I LEFT

I DIDN'T CALL ANYONE
I KNEW IT WAS REAGAIX, IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANYONE ELSE
AND EVEN IF IT WASN'T..
WHAT WAS KEEPING ME ON RINGELTEC ANYMORE?

. I'M SORRY
I'M SO TIRED


YOU CAN SLEEP ON THE SHIP
PUT ONE PAW IN FRONT OF THE OTHER AND MAYBE WE CAN BEAT MY SCHEDULE



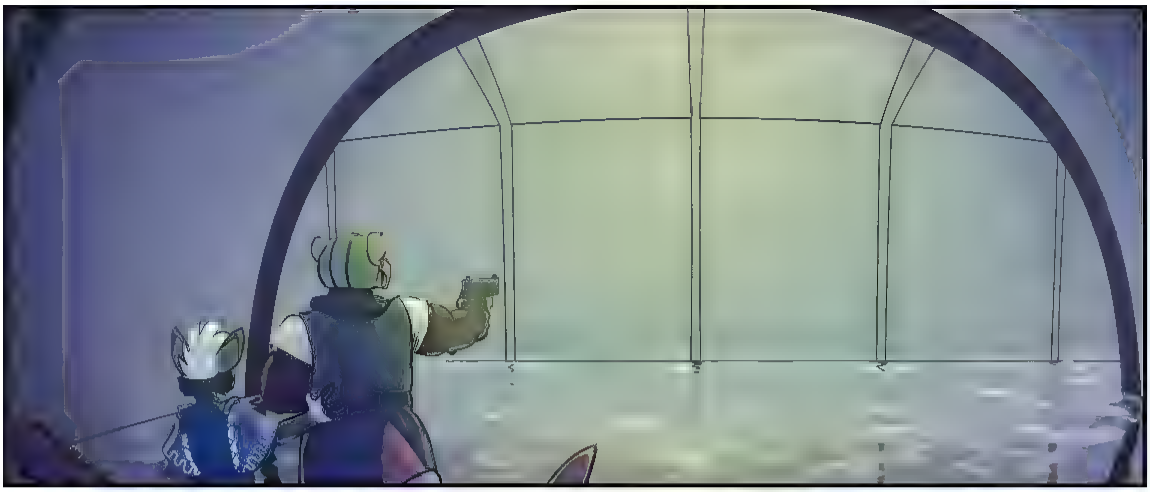

WHERE ARE YOU THINKING OF GOING?
LIOTEC, PROBABLY TO DO SEX WORK
KINDA STEREOTYPICAL, ISN'T IT?
IT'S A NICHE WE FILL
IN FACT, UNTIL FIRST CONTACT, WE HARDLY CONSIDERED IT A **PROFESSION** AT ALL
IT'S LIKE PAYING FOR OXYGEN
SOME PLACES YOU DO PAY FOR OXYGEN
I GUESS
WHAT SORT OF GUEST QUARTERS DO YOU HAVE?
EH, IT'S A BUNK, BUT IT SHOULD BE COMFORTABLE ENOUGH
AFTER THE CHECKPOINT, IT'LL BE ABOUT THREE DAYS TO NAZU STATION
IF YOU STILL HAVE THE FUNDS, I CAN PUT YOU IN CONTACT WITH A FRIEND OF MINE
THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET YOU OVER THE GAP--

.. THAT'S NOT YOUR SHIP, IS IT?
I SWEAR TO MY GRANDFATHER, UNTIL I GET US OUT OF HERE AND YOU FIND A WAY TO PAY FOR THAT
...WE ARE JOINED AT THE HIP
GULP

THREE WEEKS LATER

HE'S HERE
GODS!
WOAH HEY, IT'S JUST ME
YOU COULD HAVE BEEN LESS STARTLING!
YOU KNOW THOSE SAFETY TRAINING VIDEOS FOR WHEN YOU WORK AROUND HEAVY MACHINERY?
NO
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO APPROACH SOMEONE HOLDING DANGEROUS IMPLEMENTS WITH A GENTLE SQUEEZE TO THE SHOULDER
AS TENSE AS YOU ARE, YOU'D SHOOT ME IN THE GUT ANYWAY
NUH-UH, I DIRECTED ONE OF THOSE THINGS, SO I ASSUME IT WORKS EXACTLY AS SCRIPTED
A DIRECTOR WHO FOLLOWS THE SCRIPT? HOW SCANDALOUS
DON'T TELL ANYONE!

YOU SURE HID THE CARDS DEEP
IF THERE'S ANYTHING I'VE WANTED TO DO AT LEAST ONCE IN MY LIFE, IT'S HIDE A BURIED TREASURE
YOU REMEMBER WHERE IT IS?
OF COURSE!
HE'S ONLY WAITING UNTIL THIS EVENING
I KNOW! I HAD A MNEMONIC. LEMME JUST TRY TO REMEMBER...
CRACK



HURRY UP

CLICK
SLUCP

SCREEEEEEEP

VERY QUIETLY, NOW
DO YOU HAPPEN TO BE RAKHAM YRRARE?

WHO WANTS TO KNOW?
SOMEONE WHO WILL LET YOU LIVE IF YOU JUST GIVE HIM WHATEVER REAGAIX IS AFTER

HE MUST BE DESPERATE TO GET RIPPED OFF BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU
DON'T PLAY LIKE YOU'RE ANY DIFFERENT
YOU GOT TWO CHOICES. HAND OVER THE CONTRA AND LIVE, OR DIE AND I TAKE IT ANYWAY

SCREEP

IN THERE
KLNC

AND DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT TRYING TO SMACK ME WITH THAT
...
..HOW FAR BACK DID YOU PUT THE--
SNAP
SHIT!!
THANKS FOR SPRINGING THAT FOR ME, BY THE WAY
ANCESTORS, RAKHAM!
WHAT HAPPENED TO 'JOINED AT THE HIP'? SOUNDED FUN WHEN YOU FIRST BROUGHT IT UP

IT'S FINE, I TOOK CARE OF HIM!
THAT'S NOT THE PROBLEM
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
CLAK
AIM CAREFULLY, DON'T HIT THE SATCHEL
RUN NOW!
KSSHHH!

BZZT
BZZT
BAM
BZZT
GO, GO! THE SHIELD ONLY LASTS THREE SECONDS!
WHERE DID YOU EVEN GET THAT?
I HAVE MY WAYS
SO WHO'S YOUR MYSTERIOUS CONTACT?
HIS NAME IS IZUKKOGANIA
BE WARNED, HE'S INTIMIDATING
MORESO THAN THIS MESS?!
MUCH

WOAH!!
BLAM BLAM
KSHHHHHHH
NO SERIOUSLY, WHERE DID YOU GET THOSE?
THE OLD GUY WITH THE EYE HAD THEM IN STOCK AND THEY SOUNDED COOL..

WHERE DID THEY GET OFF TO!?
THEY MUST HAVE BOLTED PAST US, DOWN THE K-CORRIDOR!
SPREAD OUT! THEY CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR!
THAT'S NOT GOING TO HELP RIGHT NOW

YOU WANTED US TO GET THESE GUNS!
TO **DEFEND**, NOT TO **ATTACK**
YEAH BUT...
THINK! WE'RE **OUTNUMBERED**, RAKHAM!

IT'S NOT **FAIR!**
WHY CAN'T IT JUST WORK LIKE IT DOES IN THE MOVIES?! WHY CAN'T THE GOOD GUY JUST GET AWAY WITH THE LOVE INTEREST AND LOOK GOOD DOING IT?

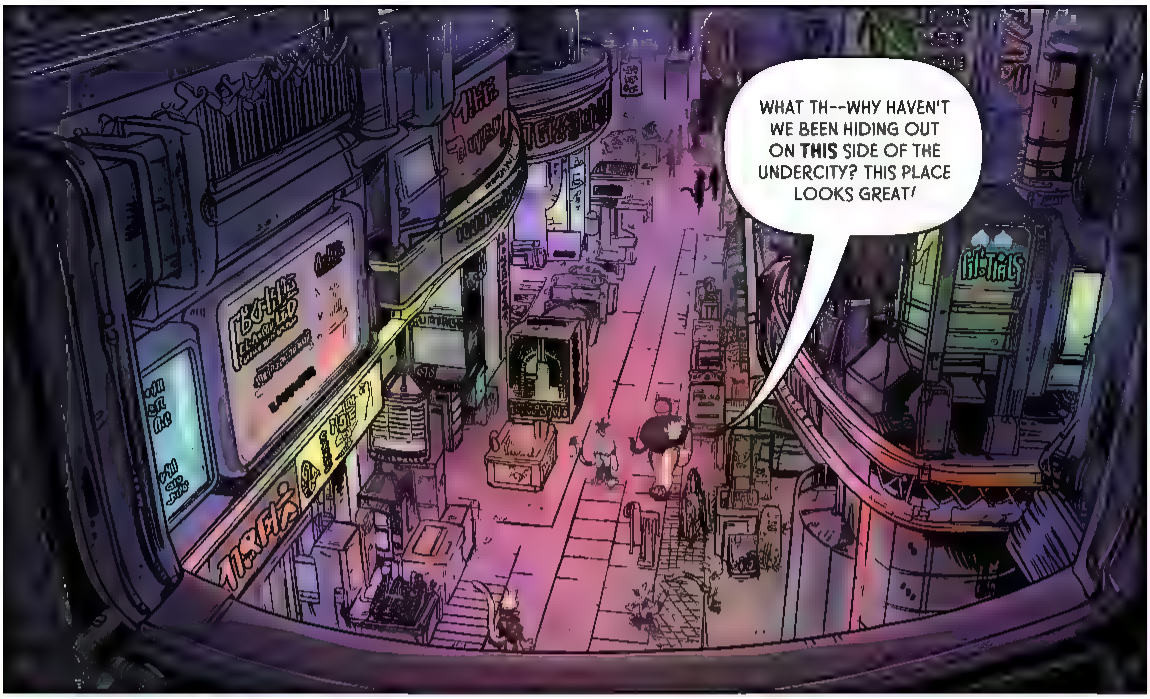
YOU EVER HEAR THE PHRASE 'DON'T BE A HERO'?
IT'S NOT BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT HEROES
IT'S BECAUSE HEROES **GET THEMSELVES KILLED**

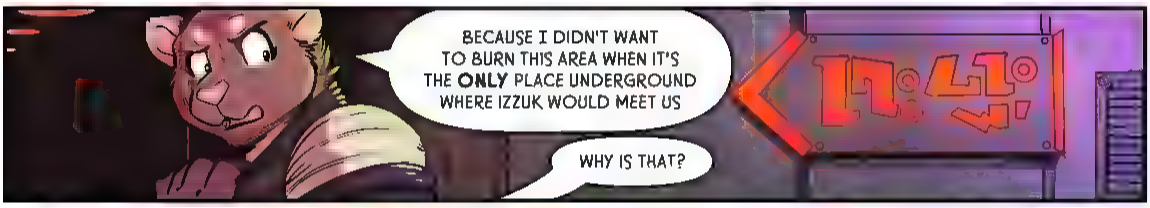
BELIEVE ME... **DON'T ESCALATE** WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO
RIGHT NOW THEY JUST WANT MONEY
DON'T MAKE THEM **ALSO** WANT REVENGE

..AM I THE LOVE INTEREST IN THAT FANTASY?
UH, WELL...

*
CLANK
BRR

CLANG!


WHAT TH--WHY HAVEN'T WE BEEN HIDING OUT ON **THIS** SIDE OF THE UNDERCITY? THIS PLACE LOOKS GREAT!


BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO BURN THIS AREA WHEN IT'S THE **ONLY** PLACE UNDERGROUND WHERE IZZUK WOULD MEET US
WHY IS THAT?

NAMES?

HERE WE'RE HERE TO MEET **IZZUKOGANAIA** AND DON'T WISH TO BE BOTHERED
IN THE BACK
LEAVE YOUR WEAPONS AT THE DOOR

HEY!
STOP THEM!
NO ONE GETS IN UNLESS THEY'RE ON THE LIST
THOSE TWO ARE CARRYING SOMETHING MORE VALUABLE THAN ALL OUR LIVES PUT TOGETHER
I CAN ASSURE YOU A SHARE OF THE PROFITS
AS IF I'VE NEVER HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE
IF YOU AIN'T ON THE LIST, YOU AIN'T GETTIN' IN

SO... I'M NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH UMBRAN NAMES--
LIO? SHOULD I BE WEARING SOME POWER ARMOR?
IZZUK IS NOT AN UMBRAN
HE'S NOT LIO, EITHER
WELL WHAT! WHY ARE YOU BEING SO **COY** ABOUT--
GHOJA! SO **THIS** IS THE LITTLE TROUBLEMAKER...
GODS UNKNOWN!!

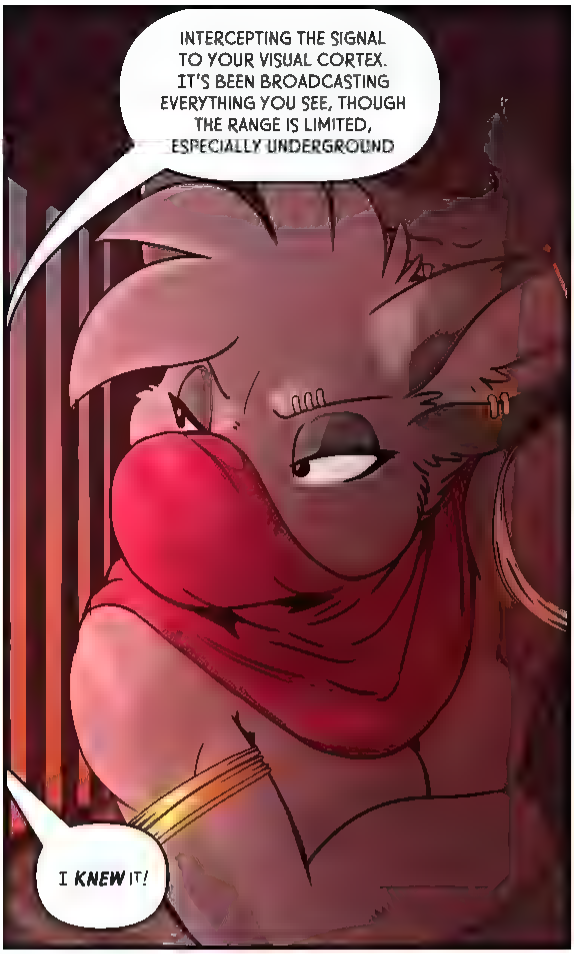
RAKHAM!
I'VE WORKED TOO HARD TO MAKE THIS CONTACT, SO YOU'RE GONNA SIT AND YOU'RE GONNA DO WHAT THE TUREK TELLS YOU IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BECOME MAFIA CHOW
MAYBE I COULD LIVE IN THE UNDERCITY THE REST OF MY LIFE!
I'M LEAVING EVENTUALLY, YRRARE, WITH OR WITHOUT YOU
HOW LONG DO YOU THINK YOU CAN SURVIVE HERE ON YOUR OWN?
I'D PIN IT AT ELEVEN DAYS
PLEASE DON'T KILL ME
BELIEVE ME, IF I WANTED YOU DEAD, I'D JUST LET OLOX DO IT

LISTEN, RINGEL. I DON'T LIKE GETTING MY CLAWS DIRTY
THEY ONLY LET THE SQUEAKIEST CLEAN OF TUREK TRADE ON RINGELTEC

WHICH IS WHY **NONE** OF THIS IS GETTING BACK TO ME, OR I **WILL** LET OLOX FIND YOU
YESSIR

GOOD
HOLD STILL
BEEP

WHAT'S THAT?
HOW OLOX MANAGED TO FIND YOU
YOUR RIGHT EYE HAS BEEN BUGGED
BUGGED?!


INTERCEPTING THE SIGNAL TO YOUR VISUAL CORTEX. IT'S BEEN BROADCASTING EVERYTHING YOU SEE, THOUGH THE RANGE IS LIMITED, ESPECIALLY UNDERGROUND
I KNEW IT!

WHEN YOU ASKED REAGAIX FOR THE FACE CHANGE, HE WAS ALWAYS INTENDING TO HAVE THE SURGEON BUG YOU. TO LITERALLY KEEP AN EYE ON YOU
THAT'S WHY HE DIDN'T HAVE TO INSIST ON OBSERVING YOUR SURGERY PROGRESS PERSONALLY! HE LET YOU DIG YOUR OWN HOLE, THEN TRACKED YOU DOWN TO DISPOSE OF YOU

OH GODS I'M SUCH AN IDIOT
I WILL NOT CONTRADICT YOUR ASSESSMENT

SO WE JUST NEED TO GET RID OF THE TRACKER, RIGHT? LET'S GET A DOCTOR, AND--
SORRY, BUT WITH OLOX INVOLVED, WE HAVE NEITHER THE TIME NOR ANYONE'S TRUST
THEN WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGE--
AAAAAAAAAAAA

AH, MISTRESS KYYRYK, MY APOLOGIES FOR THE DISTURBANCE, WILL YOU PLEASE FETCH A CLEAN TOWEL AND MEDICAL FOAM?
IZZUK, SO HELP ME IF I FIND OUT YOU KILLED ANOTHER GUEST..
PLEASE REFRAIN FROM PINNING ME WITH YOUR CRUDE STEREOTYPES. THE GUEST IS FINE
MORE OR LESS
YOU ASS-BIRTHED, BABY-EATING SON OF A KRAKUN!
ANCESTORS DAMN YOU, IZZUK, I TOLD HIM HE COULD TRUST YOU!
I AM SAVING HIS LIFE
THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT! OUR TRAUMA RESPONSES ARE DIFFERENT AND YOU KNOW FULL WELL THIS IS TOO MUCH!
GHOJA, I AM. . TRYING TO BE GENTLE, FOR YOU
YOU CALL THIS GENTLE?!

I JUST REALLY WISH YOU WOULD HAVE WARNED ME...
YOU'LL BE OKAY, RAKHAM, YOU'VE HAD EVERY INCH OF YOUR BODY REPLACED, THIS IS NOTHING YOU HAVEN'T DONE BEFORE
I WAS UNDER SEDATION THEN!
THEN LET ME BE FAIR. IF IZZUK DID WARN YOU, YOU WOULD HAVE RUN
. YEAH
THAT WAS A FREE SERVICE
THE NEXT STEP WILL COST YOU
OH GODS, KILL ME NOW
BETTER NOT SAY THAT CASUALLY TO A TUREK..
WHO'S SPEAKING *CASUALLY?*
UNFORTUNATELY, REMOVING THE DEVICE DOESN'T FIX EVERYTHING
IF YOU STAY ON RINGELTEC, YOU WILL NEED ANOTHER NEW BODY
BUT I KNOW OLOX TOO WELL. HE HAS EYES AND EARS EVERYWHERE
FOR THE REMAINDER OF YOUR ASSETS, I WILL ENSURE THAT HE NEVER FINDS YOU
DO AS YOU WILL, BUT YOU WILL BE WISE TO ASSUME THAT, SO LONG AS YOU REMAIN ON RINGELTEC, HE ***WILL*** BE LOOKING FOR YOU

I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE HERE
YES YOU DO. I MADE IZZUK PROMISE HE WOULDN'T TAKE THE CASH UNLESS YOU HANDED IT OVER VOLUNTARILY
YOU DID THAT FOR ME? EVEN AFTER ALL THE TROUBLE I'VE CAUSED?
HONESTLY, THERE'S NO GOOD WAY OUT OF THIS UNLESS YOU TRUST ME
AND I CAN'T FORCE YOU TO TRUST ME
.. ESPECIALLY AFTER WHAT IZZUK DID
I'M... SSSSORRY...
YOU'RE CLEVER, RAKHAM
I'M SURE YOU COULD FIGURE OUT A WAY TO START OVER ON YOUR OWN
NO. TRYING TO BE CLEVER GOT ME INTO THIS MESS
I NEVER SHOULD HAVE TRIED TO DO THIS BY MYSELF
THIS MONEY'S MORE THAN WORTHLESS IF IT ONLY LEAVES ME FRIENDLESS

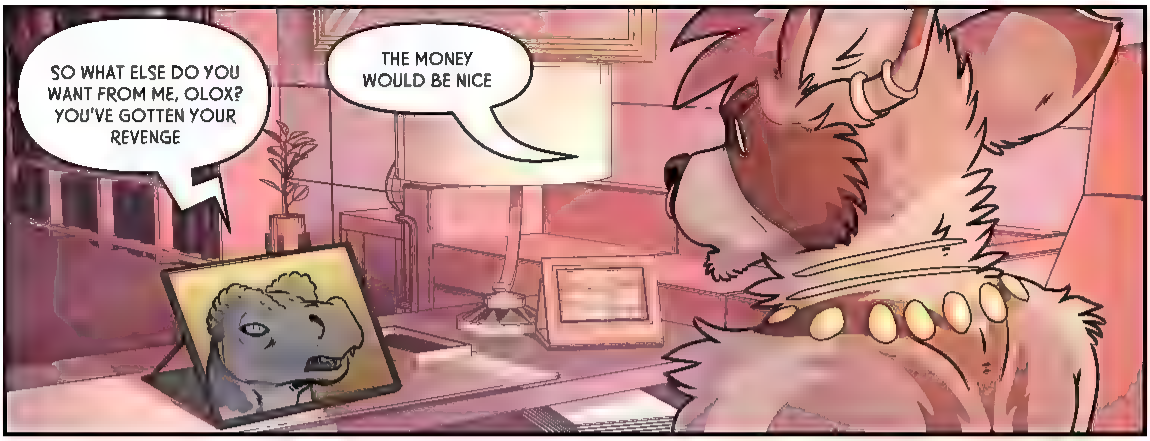
RAKHAM, I'M SERIOUS
SO AM I
AND I'M NOT JUST SAYING THIS BECAUSE OF THE PAINKILLERS...
I OWE YOU, IF NOTHING ELSE
THE RED ONES ARE TWO HUNDRED MILLION YKU, THE GREEN ONES ARE TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND
I'VE COUNTED AND CHECKED
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
JUST OVER TWENTY-TWO BILLION. IT ISN'T QUITE ENOUGH TO COVER THE LOSS OF A SHIP, BUT GHOJA'S ALWAYS BEEN AN EXCELLENT PILOT AND I'D HATE TO LOSE HER
YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A FLATTERER
I'LL NEED TO SPEAK WITH MESSUZARK, BUT I'LL CONSIDER THIS RESTITUTION FOR YOUR SHIP AND CARGO
THANK YOU, IZZY

YOU WORK FOR HIM? VOLUNTARILY?!
TUREK ARE PERFECTLY REASONABLE PEOPLE ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW THEM
NOW, RAKHAM
IF YOU WANT TO NEVER BE BOTHERED BY OLOX AGAIN, I NEED YOU...
. TO TRUST ME COMPLETELY
CAN YOU DO THAT?
YES, I CAN

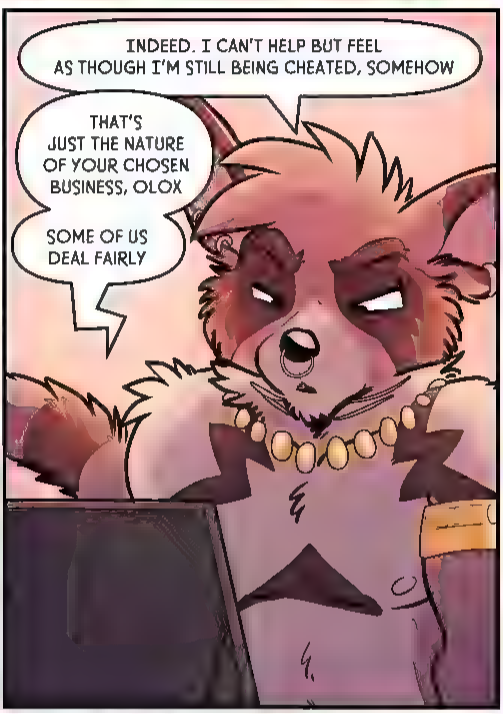
TWO WEEKS LATER...
WE'VE TRACKED SUGO!
UGH, FINALLY
I WASN'T LOOKING FORWARD TO SWEEPING THE UNDERCITY FOR ANOTHER MONTH
WHERE IS HE?
VESEX SPACEPORT APPARENTLY
HE'S SOMEHOW MANAGED TO BOARD THE INDIGO STARCUTTER, AND IS DISABLING THE AUTOPILOT
HOW THE HELL DID HE GET PAST SECURITY?
JETZI...
YES, SIR?
LEAVE IT FOR NOW
BUT--
PUT ME IN COMMUNICATION WITH IZZUKOGANAIA OF THE STEEL NEBULA SHIPPING COMPANY
AS PRIVATE AS POSSIBLE

CLAK
OLOX
IZZUK. YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER
I CAN'T BEGIN TO IMAGINE WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT
PLEASE, IZZUK, WE'RE OLD FRIENDS
BUT YOUR TUREK PSYCHOLOGY MAKES YOU SO PRONE TO UNNECESSARY RISK
I'VE KNOWN ABOUT YOUR PLAN FOR DAYS
INDIGO STARCUTTER, THIS IS RINGELTEC ORBITAL SECURITY
HALT AT ONCE AND SUBMIT TO BOARDING FOR IMMEDIATE INSPECTION
REDUCE YOUR VELOCITY AND DO NOT APPROACH THE GATE

I AM DRYNTZAVE JERIE AND I HAVE CLEARANCE AND FULL CREDENTIALS TO LEAVE! MY MISSION IS CRITICAL--YOU'D BETTER LET ME GO OR THE KRAKUN WILL HEAR ABOUT THIS!
THIS IS A REAGAIX SHIP, SIR, TRACKING JUST PINPOINTED ITS REAL ORIGIN THE TRANSPONDER HAS BEEN TAMPERED WITH WE HAVE PERMISSION TO SCUTTLE IT
FIRE AT WILL
WAIT... WAIT!!


SO WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT FROM ME, OLOX? YOU'VE GOTTEN YOUR REVENGE
THE MONEY WOULD BE NICE

NO YOU BLEW UP MY SHIP UNPROVOKED, AND YOU ORDERED YOUR OWN SHIP SCUTTLED OUT OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL
I'M KEEPING THE REST OF THE CASH AS PAYMENT, UNLESS YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE THESE DEALINGS HEADED TO PUBLIC COURT
YOU WILL SIMPLY HAVE TO ACCEPT ***SENDING A MESSAGE*** AS THE SATISFACTION YOU WILL RECEIVE FROM THIS ENTIRE ENTERPRISE


INDEED. I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL AS THOUGH I'M STILL BEING CHEATED, SOMEHOW
THAT'S JUST THE NATURE OF YOUR CHOSEN BUSINESS, OLOX
SOME OF US DEAL FAIRLY

YOU THINK YOU DEALT WITH SUGO FAIRLY?
HE PAID THE PRICE FOR HIS HUBRIS

SOMEDAY, WE ALL WILL

SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY
KZRRT
EVERYBODY OUT
GODS OF KNOWN SPACE! DOES CRYO ALWAYS FEEL LIKE IT TAKES AN ETERNITY?

I DON'T GET IT
I TRIED TO TRICK REAGAIX TOO, BUT HE DIDN'T BUY IT WHEN I DID IT

THE SECOND LAW OF DECEPTION: WHEN THE ENEMY SUSPECTS DECEIT, DO NOT MAKE PRETENSE TOWARD INNOCENCE
MAKE THEM BELIEVE WHATEVER THEY EXPECT TO FIND

BUT ORBITAL DEFENSE COULD HAVE BOARDED AND FOUND IT WAS ALL AUTOPILOT AND PRERECORDED MESSAGES!
IT WOULD NOT HAPPEN. I HAVE SEEN SIMILAR OUTCOMES BEFORE, AND ANTICIPATED A HEAVY-HANDED RESPONSE
AND SO OLOX ERASED ALL EVIDENCE OF OUR DECEPTION FOR US

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HACKED THE STARCUTTER YOURSELF; YOU HAVE ALL THIS TALENT AND YOU GOT INTO MAKING MOVIES?!
WELL, I STARTED AS A SET ENGINEER...

NOW, YOU KNOW THE DEAL
WHEN I RETURN IN THIRTEEN CYCLES, I WANT YOU BOTH TO HAVE NEW NAMES AND FACES
THEN YOU'RE GOING TO REPAY THE TEN MILLION YKU I'M LOANING BACK TO YOU
AND YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT BY BECOMING A PILOT FOR ME
YOU'RE REALLY GONNA TRUST ME NOT TO RUN OFF?
I THINK YOU'RE SMARTER THAN THAT, NOW
YOU MAY STILL BE IN DEBT, BUT TUREK MAKE ONLY FAIR DEALS
IT'S BETTER THAN BEING A SLAVE, OR DEAD
!
BESIDES... GHOJA WILL MAKE SURE OF THAT
SHE'S HOLDING ALL THE CASH
COME ON, STUPID. I WANNA BE A BLONDE. I'VE ALWAYS HEARD THEY HAVE MORE FUN

DOES THIS BACKWATER PLANET *EVEN HAVE* PLASTIC SURGEONS?
NOTHING FANCY, BUT THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO RECOLOR YOUR FUR AND REPLACE THAT EYE
I'LL SEE YOU IN A YEAR, GHOJA. TRY NOT TO DIE
DON'T DIE YOURSELF!
I NEVER MAKE THAT PROMISE

...I'M SORRY FOR DRAGGING YOU INTO ALL THIS
EH, WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO? BELIEVE ME, LIFE TAKES SOME WEIRD TURNS
ONCE ALL MY THOUGHTS CATCH UP WITH ME AGAIN, I MIGHT NEED TO CRY FOR A WEEK OR A MONTH STRAIGHT
AT LEAST YOU'LL FEEL SAFE ENOUGH TO HAVE THOSE THOUGHTS. YOU DID IT, RAKHAM. YOU SURVIVED
YOU GET ANOTHER CHANCE
BELIEVE ME, I KNOW. MY MATE JUST SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE WITH ME
...ISN'T TEN MILLION A BIT MUCH FOR JUST A COLOR CHANGE AND AN EYE REPLACEMENT?
LOOK AT IT THIS WAY... THIS IS THE FIRST VACATION I'VE HAD IN A DECADE, AND YOU'RE TREATING ME
OH BOY...
THE END